

## *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Adapted from : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen\\_Eighty-Four](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Eighty-Four)

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, sometimes published as *1984*, is a dystopian novel by George Orwell published in 1949. The novel is set in Airstrip One (formerly known as Great Britain), a province of the superstate Oceania in a world of perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance, and public manipulation, dictated by a political system euphemistically named English Socialism (or Ingsoc in the government's invented language, Newspeak) under the control of a privileged Inner Party elite that persecutes all individualism and independent thinking as "thoughtcrimes". The tyranny is epitomised by Big Brother, the quasi-divine Party leader who enjoys an intense cult of personality, but who may not even exist. The Party "seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power." The protagonist of the novel, Winston Smith, is a member of the Outer Party who works for the Ministry of Truth (or Minitrue), which is responsible for propaganda and historical revisionism. His job is to rewrite past newspaper articles so that the historical record always supports the current party line. Smith is a diligent and skillful worker, but he secretly hates the Party and dreams of rebellion against Big Brother. As literary political fiction and dystopian science-fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a classic novel in content, plot, and style. Many of its terms and concepts, such as *Big Brother*, *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, *Newspeak*, *Room 101*, *Telescreen*,  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and *memory hole*, have entered everyday use since its publication in 1949. Moreover, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* popularised the adjective *Orwellian*, which describes official deception, secret surveillance, and manipulation of recorded history by a totalitarian or authoritarian state.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is set in Oceania, one of three inter-continental superstates that divided the world among themselves after a global war. Most of the action takes place in London, the "chief city of Airstrip One", the Oceanic province that "had once been called England or Britain".<sup>[28]</sup> Posters of the Party leader, Big Brother, bearing the caption "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU", dominate the city, while the ubiquitous *telescreen* (transceiving television set) monitors the private and public lives of the populace. The social class hierarchy of Oceania has three levels:

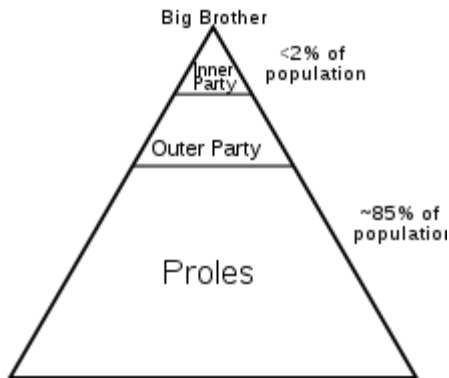
- (I) the upper-class Inner Party, the elite ruling minority, who make up 2% of the population.
- (II) the middle-class Outer Party, who make up 13% of the population.
- (III) the lower-class Proles (from *proletariat*), who make up 85% of the population and represent the uneducated working class.

As the government, the Party controls the population with four ministries:

- the Ministry of Peace (Minipax) deals with war,
- the Ministry of Plenty (Miniplenty) deals with economic affairs (rationing and starvation),
- the Ministry of Love (Miniluv) deals with law and order (torture and brainwashing),
- the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue) deals with news, entertainment, education and art (propaganda).

After the Second World War, the United Kingdom fell to civil war and then was absorbed into Oceania. Simultaneously, the USSR conquered mainland Europe and established the second superstate of Eurasia. The third superstate, Eastasia, comprises the regions of East Asia and Southeast Asia. The three superstates wage perpetual war for the remaining unconquered lands of the world, forming and breaking alliances as is convenient. From his childhood (1949–53), Winston remembers the Atomic Wars fought in Europe, western Russia, and North America.

## Plot



Oceanian society: Big Brother atop, the Party in middle, the Proles at bottom, in 1984.

The story of Winston Smith presents the world in the year 1984, after a global atomic war, via his perception of life in Airstrip One (the former United Kingdom), a province of Oceania, one of the world's three superstates; his intellectual rebellion against the Party and illicit romance with Julia; and his consequent imprisonment, interrogation, torture, and re-education by the Thinkpol in the Miniluv.

### Winston Smith

Winston Smith, a member of the Outer Party (middle class), lives in the ruins of an England already ravaged by World War II, civil conflict, and the revolution which brought the Party to power. At some point in the past he was separated from his family, placed in an orphanage, and trained as a civil servant by the state. Winston leads an austere existence, confined to a one-room apartment on a subsistence diet of black bread and synthetic meals washed down with Victory-brand gin. He begins retaining a journal criticising the Party and its enigmatic leader, Big Brother, which — if and when uncovered by the Thought Police — warrants certain death. The flat has an alcove, beside the telescreen, where Winston apparently cannot be seen, and thus believes he has some privacy, while writing in his journal: *"Thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thoughtcrime IS death."* The telescreens (in every public area, and the quarters of the Party's members), have hidden microphones and cameras. These devices, alongside informers, permit the Thought Police to spy upon everyone and so identify anyone who might endanger the Party's régime; children, most of all, are indoctrinated to spy and inform on suspected thought-criminals — especially their parents.

At the Ministry of Truth, Winston is an editor responsible for historical revisionism, concurring the past to the Party's ever-changing official version of the past; thus making the government of Oceania seem omniscient. As such, he perpetually rewrites records and alters photographs, rendering the deleted people as "unpersons"; the original documents are incinerated in a "memory hole". Despite enjoying the intellectual challenges of historical revisionism, he becomes increasingly fascinated by the *true past* and tries to learn more about it.

### Julia

One day, at the Minitrue, as Winston is assisting a woman who has fallen down, she surreptitiously hands him a folded paper note; later, at his desk, he covertly reads the message: I LOVE YOU. The woman is "Julia", a young dark haired mechanic who repairs the Minitrue novel-writing machines. Before that occasion, Winston loathed the sight of her, since women tend to be the most fanatical supporters of Ingsoc. He particularly loathed her because of her membership in the fanatical Junior

Anti-Sex League. Additionally, Julia is the type of woman he believed he could not attract: young and puritanical. Nonetheless, his hostility towards her vanishes upon reading the message. As it turns out, Julia is a thoughtcriminal too, and hates the Party as much as he does.

Cautiously, Winston and Julia begin a love affair, at first meeting in the country, at a clearing in the woods, then at the belfry of a ruined church, and afterwards in a rented room atop an antiques shop in a proletarian neighbourhood of London. There, they think themselves safe and unobserved, because the rented bedroom has no apparent telescreen, but, unknown to Winston and Julia, the Thought Police were aware of their love affair.

The Thought Police capture Winston and Julia in their bedroom and deliver them to the Ministry of Love for interrogation. Charrington, the shop keeper who rented the room to them, reveals himself as an officer of the Thought Police. Soon after his arrival at Miniluv, Winston is greeted by O'Brien. It turns out that O'Brien is also a Thought Police agent; he was part of a false flag operation used by the Thought Police to root out suspected thoughtcriminals. After a prolonged regimen of systematic beatings and psychologically draining interrogation, O'Brien, now Smith's interrogator, tortures Winston with electroshock, showing him how, through controlled manipulation of perception (e.g. seeing whatever number of fingers held up that the Party demands one should see, whatever the apparent reality, i.e.  $2+2=5$ ), Winston can "cure" himself of his "insanity" – his manifest hatred for the Party. In long, complex conversations, he explains the Inner Party's motivation: complete and absolute power, mocking Winston's assumption that it was somehow altruistic and "for the greater good". Asked if the Brotherhood exists, O'Brien replies that this is something Winston will never know; it will remain an unsolvable quandary in his mind. During a torture session, his imprisonment in the Ministry of Love is explained: "There are three stages in your reintegration ... There is learning, there is understanding, and there is acceptance," i.e. of the Party's assertion of reality.

### **Confession and betrayal**

In the first stage of political re-education, Winston Smith admits to and confesses to crimes he did and did not commit, implicating anyone and everyone, including Julia. In the second stage, O'Brien makes Winston understand that he is rotting away; by this time he is little more than skin and bones. Winston counters: "I have not betrayed Julia." O'Brien agrees Winston had not betrayed Julia because he "had not stopped loving her; his feelings toward her had remained the same." One night, in his cell, Winston awakens, screaming: "Julia! Julia! Julia, my love! Julia!" O'Brien rushes into the cell and sends him to Room 101, the most feared room in the Ministry of Love, where resides each prisoner's worst fear, which is forced upon him or her. In Room 101 is Acceptance, the final stage of the political re-education of Winston Smith, whose primal fear of rats is invoked when a wire cage holding hungry rats is fitted onto his face. As the rats are about to reach Winston's face, he shouts: "Do it to Julia!" thus betraying her and relinquishing his love for her.

### **Re-encountering Julia**

Some time after being restored to orthodox thought and reintegrated into Oceania society, Winston encounters Julia in a park. Julia reveals that she has endured a similar ordeal to Winston, and each admits betraying the other.

### **Conversion**

An alcoholic Winston sits by himself in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, still troubled by "false memories" which he is convinced are indeed false. He tries to put them out of his mind when suddenly a news bulletin announces Oceania's "decisive victory" over Eurasian armies in Africa. A raucous celebration begins outside, and Winston imagines himself a part of it. As he looks up in admiration at a portrait of Big Brother, Winston realises that "the final, indispensable, healing change" within his own mind had only been completed at just that moment. He engages in a "blissful dream" in which he offers a full, public confession of his crimes and is executed. He feels that all is well now that he has at last achieved a victory over himself, ending his previous "stubborn, self-willed exile" from the love of Big Brother – a love Winston now happily returns.

## Characters

### Principal characters

- Winston Smith—the protagonist who is a phlegmatic everyman.
- Julia—Winston's lover who is a covert "rebel from the waist downwards" who publicly espouses Party doctrine as a member of the fanatical Junior Anti-Sex League.
- Big Brother—the dark-eyed, mustachioed embodiment of the Party who rules Oceania.
- O'Brien—a member of the Inner Party who poses as a member of The Brotherhood, the counter-revolutionary resistance, in order to deceive, trap, and capture Winston and Julia.
- Emmanuel Goldstein—ostensibly a former leader of the Party, counter-revolutionary leader of the Brotherhood, and author of *The Book, The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, Goldstein is the symbolic Enemy of the State—the national nemesis who ideologically unites the people of Oceania with the Party, especially during the Two Minutes Hate and other fearmongering. While Winston eventually learns that *The Book* is the product of an Inner Party committee that includes O'Brien, whether Goldstein or his Brotherhood are real or fabrications of Party propaganda is something that neither Winston nor the reader is permitted to know.